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By EDWARD WELSH

Several months ago, an announcement was made and a call issued for a National Negro Congress to be held in Chicago on February 14, 15 and 16. At the time the call was issued considerable interest was manifested in certain quarters which seemed to indicate a keen desire among Negroes for something of this sort, together with a recognition of the possibility that the congress might produce certain positive values in the way of advancing the interests of the Negro people.

No one can question the need for or the timeliness of such a congress. The plight of the Negro masses in this country, particularly after seven years of the most serious crisis in the history of capitalism, has created the feeling among Negroes generally, and also among many other elements in society who hold a progressive point of view on this question, that something must be done to meet this grave problem. That there is a basis for such a congress is further indicated by the fact that, in the past few years, several small conferences, held under different auspices, have taken place in various parts of the country where attempts were made to grapple with certain phases of this very same problem. There is no doubt but that a national congress if properly organized and devoid of either self-seeking or partisan considerations, could produce an instrument to galvanize the broad masses of Negroes into action for their own defense and direct them towards beating back the growing forces of reaction.

In considering this important problem of developing such a movement, certain fundamentals must be borne in mind and should be the starting point.

Under the conditions of modern capitalism any movement, to be really progressive in its direction and really effective in its results must be basically a movement of labor, must be rooted primarily in the trade unions and mass organizations of the working class, with the support, of course, of all other elements who are willing to back up its program. This is as true of a National Negro Congress as it is true of the American League against War and Fascism or any other movement that is serious about its intentions. The moment that this basic fact is ignored or misunderstood, the movement faces grave dangers leading ultimately to sterility or worse.

Unfortunately, those who are responsible for calling the National Negro Congress have utterly disregarded these basic considerations with the result that the congress is well on its way towards becoming one of the newer models of all-class political monstrosities commonly referred to as "People's Front." Of course there are many who will consider it quite an achievement. Is this not bringing the decisions of the Seventh World Congress to the Negro masses? A "People's Front" in France! Why not a Negro "Peoples Front" in America?

Local sponsoring committees have been organized in over forty communities throughout the United States. An examination of the make-up of these committees will reveal some startling facts. In almost every instance, the sponsoring committees have a preponderance of Negro ministers. The remaining members consist of various types of petty bourgeois elements including business men, lawyers, college professors or their

wives, representatives of Republican clubs and other cheap and discredited politicians plus a host of other unimportant elements representing no one but themselves, interested only in finding a place in the sun for-themselves, and with no objection, of course, to seeing their names in print. The composition of these committees seldom varies and is about the same everywhere. Not even in the most highly industrialized centers such as New York, Chicago, Detroit, Pittsburgh and the many other places where Negroes are employed by the tens of thousands in industry, or where Negroes are organized into trade unions or are seeking to be organized, do we find any genuine representation of these workers on any of these committees. If there are any, by chance, they are completely snowed under by "respectable" people. Many committees include as signers the names of some of the worst anti-labor, anti-union elements among the Negroes. Considering this state of affairs it should surprise no one that Ham Fish, the vicious Red-baiter, has expressed his intentions of attending the congress for the purpose of attempting to utilize it to further the Borah-for-President campaign.

In New York City, which contains a Negro population of over 300,000, the composition of the sponsoring committee is hardly any better. With several thousand Negroes organized in the trade unions, with a Negro Labor Center established in Harlem embracing practically all of the important unions having Negro members, no one considered it important enough to approach these people on the matter of the sponsoring committee or the congress itself!

At a gathering in Harlem called for the purpose of organizing the sponsoring committee, the trade unions were conspicuous by their absence. No one bothered to explain why. It was simply of no consequence to most, if not all, of those present. When the time arrived for the election of officers, it was none other than the Communist Party members that proposed and supported the nomination of a minister for the chairmanship of this committee! This would have gone through without much ado were it not for the presence of a representative of the Communist Party (Opposition) who criticized the way in which the whole thing was being organized and pointed to the need for winning over trade unionists for the congress, thereby broadening its labor base and proposed that, as chairman of the New York sponsoring committee, someone must be found who was much more closely identified with the organized labor movement. He further proposed that the sponsoring committee should promptly issue a call for a New York conference for the purpose of enlisting the aid and active support of as wide an array of organizations as possible behind the national congress. Although these proposals were adopted, they were conveniently forgotten afterwards. With the lone exception of substituting a trade unionist for the minister as the chairman of the committee, nothing was done to improve the situation in New York. No conference was called; little effort was made to draw in the trade unions, until it was too late to do anything about the matter.

In Chicago, the very city in which the Congress is to be held, certain important Negro trade unionists have categorically refused to have anything to do with either the local sponsoring com-

mittee or the congress itself because of the prominent place given to notorious labor-haters and company unionists! Perhaps, had the approach been made directly to the trade unions first, such elements could have been eliminated. As a matter of fact, had there been as much effort and energy spent in contracting trade unions as was spent in contacting ministers and politicians, the congress as a whole would be on a much sounder footing.

The National Negro Congress, as at present constituted, promises to be a very narrow congress in spite of all the fanfare. As it now stands the congress will be entirely divorced from the labor movement, from the Negroes in trade unions and from all important working class organizations. It will be largely a gathering of the Negro middle class elements, and the more unwholesome ones at that, together with some communists and sympathizers. Already we are hearing meaningless boasts of the possible attendance of between 800 and 1,000 delegates. But getting delegates is a relatively simple matter. The important thing is not the number of delegates present but whom these delegates represent!

That such a state of affairs can exist today seems almost incredible. The C.P. has only to look at the American League Against War and Fascism as a good example of how not to build a broad movement. And why such contempt for the Negro working class? Who can afford to close their eyes and fail to recognize the great changes that are taking place in the ranks of the Negro toilers? Class lines are sharpening. Negro workers are beginning to appreciate the need for organization along economic lines. Anyone who has followed the recent developments in the labor movement must realize this. The tremendous growth of the trade unions has brought thousands of Negroes into the organized labor movement. Strikes have been conducted in which Negroes have played an important part. In the struggles of the unemployed all over the country for

adequate relief, for jobs, for unemployment and social insurance, Negroes have been found in the front ranks. The experience that the Negro workers have gained through their participation in these struggles has resulted in the growth of militancy, an increased spirit of self-reliance and self-respect and a developing consciousness of the power of organization. The phenomenal growth of the movements among the share-croppers in the South in the face of the most brutal terror, certainly bears witness to these facts.

The complete bankruptcy of the old line "race leaders" in the face of the crisis, has brought the Negro toilers to the stage where they are coming to rely less and less on forces outside their own ranks for leadership. In the struggle for jobs and relief the Negro has found himself obliged to depend upon his own forces and resources for the leadership necessary to cope with the new problems. Consequently the influence of the preachers and other self-annointed leaders has diminished considerably of late, and the Negro worker views with suspicion and grave doubt much of the advice and warning coming from these discredited has-beens. And no one has the right to attempt to revive this old leadership and restore it to its former place of power and influence. Least of all should the C.P. bear any responsibility for doing so. Yet this is precisely what will happen unless the present policy and attitude toward these people is changed.

No one should object to the inclusion in the congress of representatives of the Negro petty bourgeoisie. On the contrary, they are very necessary. As a consequence of the caste status of the Negro people in America and society, the Negro petty bourgeoisie is destined to play a far more significant and progressive role in the struggle of the Negro people for emancipation and in the general, than is the white petty bourgeois in the analogous situation. It must be made perfectly clear, however, that this will depend to a large extent upon how closely these people associate themselves with the work-